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1962/10/07

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Action Generated by DCI Cables [REDACTED] Concerning Cuban Low-Level Photography and Offensive Weapons

1. Based upon your proposal of Saturday, 25 August, that RF-101's be used over Cuba, General Carter asked General Lemnitzer on 27 August about the possibility of low-level photography using RF-101 or F8U aircraft. At that time General Lemnitzer indicated that something probably could be dug up. General Carter informed USIB at the 29 August meeting of his conversation with General Lemnitzer. At the Special Group Meeting the following day, General Lemnitzer raised the issue and said that use of RF -101 or F8U aircraft flown by US pilots would be feasible from the military point of view. General Carter pressed the point by indicating that other types of photography did not give sufficient detail and precise identification of certain types of equipment. After some discussion, the Group agreed to take cognizance of this matter and requested it be reopened at an appropriate time when specific targets and information needs could be identified.

2. On 31 August, after General Carter informed Mr. McGeorge Bundy and General Lemnitzer of the readout of U-2 flights showing SA-2 sites, the President called General Carter at 1300, asked how many people had this information, and told General Carter that he wished it put back in the box and nailed tight. This freeze continued until Saturday, 1 September, when the information was extended slightly further to the working analysts. General Carter informed Secretary Gilpatric on 1 September that the General and Karl Kaysen agreed a full readout was necessary and that some low-altitude flights were needed to pinpoint the sites.

3. Not until Tuesday, 4 September, did the President announce the presence of a missile defense system in Cuba. That day General Carter approved COMOR recommendations: in view of SAM sites on the western end of the island, it was particularly important that the next authorized mission should cover those areas of the island which were not photographed because weather or range did not permit, and that the complex eastern end of the island should be photographed again.

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4. General Carter asked DD/R on 5 September to initiate steps for fixing [redacted] to cover Cuba.

5. The President and Secretaries of State and Defense were briefed by General Carter late 6 September of a more detailed readout of the 29 August mission which led our analysts to suspect the presence of another kind of missile site--possibly surface-to-surface--at Banes. The White House put a complete freeze on this information; however, Bundy gave an OK to put the analysts to work on providing information to the policymakers on a need-to-know basis but without normal distribution.

6. USIB was brought up to date in executive session at its 7 September meeting on information concerning the SA-2 sites, the new unknown site at Banes, and also the freezing atmosphere of the White House. General Carter requested all members to advise their principals and asked also to be alerted immediately if NSA came up with further information.

7. This was the climate in the Community in early September when a U-2 had just violated the Soviet Far East; when another U-2 was lost on 8 September over the Chinese mainland; and when your first cable of 7 September arrived:

"Question very much if C-package will be helpful Cuba and urge frequent repeat missions of recent reconnaissance operations which Gilpatrick advised informative. Also I support use of RF-101's if necessary. My hunch is we might face prospect of Soviet short-range surface-to-surface missiles of portable types in Cuba which could command important targets in Southeast U. S. and possibly Latin America and the Caribbean areas."

8. General Carter, as related above and follows, had already urged use of RF-101's relative to your "hunch" about missiles. General Carter recollects showing your cable to Mr. Bundy the following day, Saturday afternoon. There is no evidence that the information was passed outside of the Agency, presumably because it was a reaffirmation of a position you had already taken before Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, General Taylor and Messrs. Johnson, Gilpatrick and Bundy on 10, 21 and 23 August.

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9. On 8 September, upon learning COMOR made Cuba targets available to JRC for possible RF-101 coverage, General Carter instructed Mr. Reber to check with Colonel Steakley to determine when JRC would seek Special Group approval.

10. On 10 September you cabled following [redacted]

"Difficult for me to rationalize extensive costly defenses being established in Cuba as such extreme costly measures to accomplish security and secrecy not consistent with other policies such as refugees, legal travel, etc. Appears to me quite possible measures now being taken are for purpose of ensuring secrecy of some offensive capability such as MRBM's to be installed by Soviets after present phase completed and country secured from over-flights. Suggest BNE study motives behind these defensive measures which even seem to exceed those provided most satellites."

General Carter sent an action memorandum on 10 September to the DD/I quoting this passage and asked the BNE to undertake the necessary analysis. BNE's response was sent to you in an 11 September cable. The response said that BNE "still persuaded that costly crash operation to install SA-2's is reasonably explained by other than desire to hide later build-up and the Soviets likely to regard advantage of major offensive build-up not equal to dangers of U. S. intervention."

11. The events of 10 September have already been chronicled in my separate memorandum. However, it was also this date that General Carter sent a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense calling further need to conduct tactical reconnaissance of Cuba, particularly the facility near Banes, indicating that the site would require in the near future photography of a larger scale than acquired by a U-2, and recommending that SecDef initiate necessary action to provide for employment of this tactical-type reconnaissance.

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12. On 13 September you cabled [REDACTED] your views of the importance of going ahead with securing release of Cuban prisoners. Included in this cable was the following:

"Also I continue to be concerned that the establishment of defensive equipment and installations is merely a prelude to the location of an offensive weapons capability and once this is done, the implementation of our policy as reported in the press might be extremely difficult and involve unacceptable dangers."

13. The following day (14 September), at the Special Group (Augmented) meeting, Colonel Steakley outlined capabilities for low-level coverage of certain targets in Cuba. It was noted that the Secretary of Defense did not wish this operation considered further until the results of Agency reconnaissance in the same area were available. Further conclusion was thus deferred until the next week's meeting, although Elder's memorandum for the record reveals that General Carter pushed hard to keep the Group disposed toward a favorable consideration later.

14. On 16 September you again cabled extensive comments on the Cuban situation making the point that we must carefully study the prospect of MRBM's in Cuba. General Carter directed that a copy of this cable be given to the DD/I and assigned action responsibility to the DD/I. The DD/I's response, contained in a cable to you on 18 September, stated that an introduction of MRBM's was unlikely because of the risk of U. S. intervention.

15. At the USIB meeting of 19 September, General Carter, in discussing terms of what would be necessary if a complete SA-2 defense would make use of the U-2 extremely hazardous if not impossible, again stated a desire to use RF-101's over Cuba. He also said that he thought use of a [REDACTED] drone over Cuba could be justified to the Special Group, adding: "We cannot put a stop to collection; otherwise, the President would never know when the point of decision was reached." At this meeting, USIB also approved NIE 85-3.

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16. At the Special Group Meeting on 20 September, [redacted] was discussed. After its use over Kamchatka was disapproved, General Carter urged its possible use against Cuba and State appeared enthusiastic. Based upon this, General Carter dispatched an action memorandum to the DD/R assigning them responsibility "within CIA [redacted] also CIA responsi- bility for planning other aerial reconnaissance operations against Cuban targets and for presentation of these CIA operations to the Special Group (Augmented) after appropriate Agency and Community coordination."

17. During this period, poor weather resulted in no exploitable take from U-2 operations. The Agency had made an operational determination that none of the four flights which evolved from the 10 September meeting would be made unless weather along the flight routes was less than 25% overcast. The first of the four flights was made on 26 September; the last on 7 October. The peripheral flights turned up additional SAM sites and coastal defense cruise-missile sites, but that is about all.

18. Conclusions of the Cuban SNIE, approved by USIB on 19 September, were cabled to you that day. While the SNIE stated that the Soviets might be tempted to establish other weapons of a more "offensive" character, such as additional types of short-range surface-to-surface missiles, and that the Soviet Union could derive considerable advantage from the establishment of medium and intermediate range ballistic missiles in Cuba, the estimate concluded:

"... It would indicate a far greater willingness to increase the level of risk in US-Soviet relations than the Soviet Union has displayed thus far, and consequently would have important policy implications with respect to other areas and other problems in East-West relations."

19. The following day, 20 September, you cabled ██████████ suggesting a most careful consideration of the conclusion that introduction of offensive missiles was unlikely. This paragraph, paragraph one of your cable, was immediately passed to the DD/I. However, no change was made to the estimate. It had already been endorsed by the Intelligence Community and released.

Lyman B. Kirkpatrick
Executive Director